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ABSTRACT

This paper contains excerpts of comments made by a panel of deans, department heads, search committee members, and others, all with professional education positions within the Mid-South Educational Research Association six-state region, offering a candid look at their criteria, preferences, and experiences regarding the employment process. Their opinions could be useful to graduate students nearing graduation and to adults seeking a job change. Subjects addressed include the following: the nature of the job market, requirements for various positions, career patterns, content and format of resumes and curricula vitae, cover letters, the interview process, follow-ups, and negotiating a contract. (KC)

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LIFE AFTER GRADUATION: THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE JOB MARKET

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A Training Session Conducted at the Annual Meeting of the
Mid-South Educational Research Association

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LIFE AFTER GRADUATION: THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE JOB MARKET

Introduction

A distinguished panel of deans, department heads, search committee members, and others, all with professional education positions within the Mid-South Educational Research Association six-state region, offered a candid discussion of their criteria, preferences, and experiences regarding the employment process. The session was intended primarily for graduate students nearing graduation, but proved to be of interest to others seeking a job change.

Subjects covered included the nature of the job market, requirements for various positions, and career patterns. The session also covered content and format of resumes and curricula vitae, cover letters, the interview process, follow-ups, and negotiating a contract.

Panelists' Comments and Guidelines

Dean, College of Education, Major Research University

Institutional Needs and Procedures

Determination of faculty need is often based on student enrollment data, grant funding generated by programs, and current directions of the institution.

Sometimes, existing faculty positions are shifted from downsizing programs to growing programs.

To aid in assessing the interpersonal skills of applicants, search committees are often diverse, in terms of discipline, gender, and ethnicity.

Most search committees are charged with finding three to five outstanding candidates.

The Dean consults with the search committee to select candidates for interview.

The search committee will then make telephone calls to references and others familiar with the candidates chosen for interview, perhaps conduct telephone interviews of the selected candidates, and conduct in-person interviews of the candidates invited to the campus.

As a general rule, a candidate who fails to get a majority of search committee votes will not be hired.

The Dean may veto any recommendation of the search committee, particularly people who, in the opinion of the Dean, may not be a good fit with the institution and their potential colleagues.

Contract negotiations usually begin within a predetermined salary range.

Efforts are made to ensure salary equity for people with comparable backgrounds and experience who are hired within a certain period of time.

Some Guidelines for Candidates

Those who wish to negotiate salaries should wait until they are actually offered the job.

Ensure that the letter of application and other documents are free of grammar and spelling errors.

Come to the interview knowing something about the institution and the program.

Come to the interview with a list of questions about the job and the institution; intelligent questions often impress the search committee.

Dress professionally. Candidates who cannot dress seriously for their interview will not be hired.

Be positive during the interview, even if confronted with negative information; turn problems into opportunities.

Do not hesitate to mention skills beyond the demands of the position, especially if they would constitute a contribution to the institution.

Overall, be upbeat in the interview and convince the committee that you really want the job.

Always follow up with a thank you letter to the search committee.

Chair of Counseling, Leadership, and Foundations, Small University

Locating Available Positions

Most universities conduct national searches and advertise in publications that have large readerships, such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Often, recruitment of women and minorities is a priority; some publications, such as *Minority and Women Doctoral Directory*, *National Minority Faculty Directory*, and *The Minority Review Journal*, target special populations.

Specific professional journals are used to advertise for positions with particular knowledge and skills likely to be found among the journal's readership.

Responding to Advertised Positions

Spelling and grammar must be perfect -- no exceptions!

A letter of application should address the position specifically, explaining how your education and experience qualify you to meet the responsibilities of the job. You should discuss recent professional assignments, tasks, and accomplishments that demonstrate your strengths and that would contribute to your success in the position sought.

Carefully compose a resume of your education, experiences, areas of expertise, publications, presentations, and recognition of your accomplishments. This document will give a first impression and should be a "class act." Consult your placement office for resume guidelines.

Request reference letters from those persons best able to address your qualifications as they relate to the position sought.

Interviewing for the Position

Do your homework. know something about the institution, the department, and the program.

Anticipate interview questions. Based on the description of the position, prepare yourself to answer questions dealing with how you would accomplish the responsibilities of the position. Prepare to discuss your past professional experiences and how those might contribute to the position sought.

Prepare relevant questions. Be prepared to ask questions about the position (not about the salary), indicating that you did your homework and that you want to be a serious contender for the job.

Search Committee Chair, Regional University

Application/Resume

Read the job description well. Apply only if you meet the requirements.

Send all that is requested. Often, partial applications are not considered.

Adhere to deadlines. Late arrivals are often not considered.

Be neat and professional. Make your first impression a good one.

Be detailed, but brief.

Try to limit letters of recommendation to one page each.

Telephone Interview

If you have an answering machine, then ensure that it has a clear, professional-sounding greeting.

Return calls promptly.

Answer questions clearly and honestly.

Give permission for "blind" reference calls and furnish the search committee with appropriate phone numbers.

Ask questions that you feel are important.

On-Campus Interview

Co-operate fully with the committee's recommendations for travel and lodging.

If you are required to demonstrate your teaching or other skills, then be well prepared. Show the committee your best performance.

Dress appropriately. Ask the committee contact beforehand what is appropriate for the campus and season.

Behave in a professional manner at all times. You are always being observed.

Assistant Director of Research and Support Services, State Department of Education

Working in a State Department of Education

Getting a job in a state department of education is not as easy nor as straightforward as getting many other jobs. Many states have merit systems and state personnel rules that create specific hoops that a successful applicant must pass through. Unlike a university or private industry, working for a state department of education entails becoming a state worker, a civil servant. The process is not as simple as private industry or a university. Some suggestions would be to:

Study the application form carefully -- it will be reviewed by people who do not understand what it is you do. Now is not the time to be humble.

Be sure to talk to someone in the personnel department to learn about any other required forms or documents.

Talk to people in the department. Learn the organizational structure.

Be patient. It may take months to get the job.

Recognize that politics will influence the process.

If you get the job, be prepared to teach many of your new colleagues what it is that you do and can bring to the job.

Recognize that the structure of most state departments of education is very tightly pyramidal. There are not many jobs at the top and they usually go to former school people.

Working in Private Industry

Applying to work in other areas of education, such as a major testing company, often does not require completion of a standard application form. Jobs in these areas are rewarding, prestigious, and difficult. The process of applying is typified by the following steps:

Submit a letter of interest and a resume, with references.

Receive acknowledgement of letter of interest.

Interview -- usually with three to five people in the organization.

Expect to deliver a brief mini-lecture on a topic of expertise.

If you receive a job offer, you will then enter into negotiations.

A Brief Summary

Carefully read the advertisement, be realistic about your own eligibility, then follow the rules for applying.

Submit letters and documents that are clear, correct, and sell you well.

Look and act professional.

Display an interest in and knowledge of the institution and the position.

Be enthusiastic -- act as though you really want the job.

Convince the search committee and other decision-makers that you will fit well in the institution and the department -- collegiality counts.